

Signs of Hope

What can we learn from ecclesial movements now flourishing in the Church?

There is also need for a better appreciation and understanding of the **signs of hope** present in the last part of this century, even though they often remain hidden from our eyes.... *In the church* they include a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity and the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture. - Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 54

The Holy Father is asking us, the Church, to celebrate this great Jubilee by deepening our awareness of the many signs of hope present in the life of the Church today. He has given pointers to some of the signs which we need to look for - wherever the Church uses the gifts of her members to the full, wherever the faithful People of God work with their priests to build up the local community, wherever the Church is open to the good things God is doing in the midst of other faith communities, these are the signs of a portion of the People of God co-operating with the Spirit of God to the full.

One particular sign of hope at the end of the 20th century, is the rise of many movements, lay communities and new religious orders in the Church. The Holy Father gathered members of these worldwide movements together in Rome at Pentecost 1998, and challenged them to "come of age" and play an integral part in the life of the Church. But the work of many of these groups goes unseen by those who are not members. It is said that good news travels fast, and this is true of births and weddings. But in general, we are better at gossiping with the bad news than promoting the good about our Church. So in this short course, I will be speaking about the work of several such communities within the Church, with which I have had direct or indirect experience. Their experiences are indeed good news - and they may have something to teach us about the signs of hope already present, or which we can work towards, in our own Christian community, too.

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1. Hidden Treasure (March 9th)

What's wrong with the Church today? The young people don't come. There's not enough priests to go round. The Church's teaching is too strict! Why did they do away with the Latin Mass? My parish priest doesn't understand me. Isn't it enough that I go to Mass on Sunday without other commitments?

Criticising the Church is very easy, and we are quick to see the signs of things which are going wrong in our Christian community. In Europe and the Americas, there are very real problems: countries which were once Catholic bastions now find themselves with decreasing numbers of priests, with many baptised Catholics ceasing the practice of their faith, or being attracted to alternative spiritualities. The situation breeds fear and worry. Such decline leads us to ask the deeper questions: What work should the Church be doing with its ever-more-limited resources? *What is the Church FOR?*

But in the midst of this decline, there is new life in the Church. In countries like France, Canada and the USA, and even here in England, new religious orders and lay communities are springing up and taking on the challenge of working for the faith in these new and difficult conditions. What motivates them to their activity? What is going on, quietly and unseen, in our own country? Let us seek out the good news!

2. Too Busy Not to Pray (March 16th)

Traditionally, Catholic orders have either been "active" or "contemplative", busy about work in the world, or else enclosed to devote their whole time to prayer. Many of the new orders and movements have adopted a third way, that of an active apostolate rooted in prayer, especially in communal and personal Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Devotion to Our Lady - the Rosary, or personal programmes of "total consecration" to Mary - also feature prominently. Meanwhile, contemporary society is searching for spiritual experiences under the broad banner called the "New Age". Why do the new movements insist on so much time given to Adoration and intercession? Why is it important to live such a deeply "spiritual" life? And how can we discern "good" spirituality from the bad?

3. By Whose Authority? (March 23rd)

Many of the new movements and communities are marked by their explicit commitment to keeping and teaching the faith taught by the Catholic Church. Understood properly, this does not mean harking back to practices which went out when the reforms of Vatican II came in, nor rejecting any of the good gifts which God has given to other Christian denominations and even other faiths. But it *does* mean affirming that the Catholic Church has the authority to teach on matters of doctrine and morality - even where the doctrine disagrees with other churches, or the moral teachings are not "convenient" for the culture we live in. Wherever there is a right understanding and right practice of Catholic teaching, there is hope for the growth of the Church without schisms or factional arguments.

4. Go Forth and Make Disciples (March 30th)

What is the mission of the Church? Jesus said, "Go forth and make disciples" - and that message is a command for all of us who have been baptised and confirmed. Witnessing about the life and message of Jesus is so fundamental to Christianity that all the Churches in Britain have been preparing for this Jubilee year 2000 with a "decade of evangelisation". Part of the response has been the rise of initiatives like "Youth 2000" - running Catholic retreats to help young people to practice their faith more deeply - or the *Alpha* Course, designed to allow Christian churches to work together to introduce Jesus to people who have never met him. Many of the new movements include some element of public witness or "faith-sharing"; others involve themselves in working for needy people and so proclaim the Gospel by actions of love rather than words. If you are reading this, Jesus is calling you to be an Evangelist, too.... so come and see how others evangelise, and discover that it's not as frightening as you think!

5. Do Not Be Afraid! (April 6th)

Hope is "the confident expectation of divine blessing", says the Catechism. In the last four weeks, we have looked at many of the movements and communities which have come into being at the dawn of the third Christian millennium. All these movements are acting in the expectation that God will bless their ministry. Some have already experienced great blessings, in the form of many vocations, many "resting" Catholics being brought into the faith, and many practicing Catholics discovering a new fervour in their faith. But all of us - not just those signed up to some special community - are called to live and act according to this great expectation. The Holy Father has been echoing the words of the Lord - "Do not be afraid!" - ever since he was elected to the Chair of Peter. The final, and most important, question of this course is this: How is God calling us, as a faith community, to live as a people confidently expecting His blessing? How, then, can we too be a Sign of Hope?

Signs of Hope

Dr Gareth Leyshon

based on a Lent course given in Billingshurst in Lent 2000 as a pastoral placement

1. Hidden Treasure

(March 9th, A.D. 2000)

What bad things are going on in the Church which worry us?

Why are these bad things? Are they really bad, or just different? A challenge to change? Do they highlight good things?

Three sorts of territory in the Church:

1. Where the Gospel has not yet been accepted (e.g. large parts of Asia)
2. Where the Gospel is being lived out (much of Africa and Latin America)
3. Where the Gospel has been lost (Western Europe, USA/Canada, Australia/NZ)

From Pope John Paul II (Tertio Millennio Adveniente 46)

Christians are called to prepare for the Great Jubilee of the beginning of the third millennium by renewing their hope in the definitive coming of the kingdom of God, preparing for it daily in their hearts, in the Christian community to which they belong, in their particular social context and in world history itself. There is also need for a better appreciation and understanding of the **signs of hope** present in the last part of this century, even though they often remain hidden from our eyes.

In *society in general*, such signs of hope include: scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice wherever they have been violated, desire for reconciliation and solidarity among different peoples, particularly in the complex relationship between the North and the South of the world.

In the church they include a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity and the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture.

Traditional Religious Orders:

1. **Monks and Nuns**, who live a contemplative life based at a fixed monastery.
e.g. Benedictines (c. A.D. 529); Carthusians (1084); Cistercians (1098)
2. **Canons**, priests who live and work as a community with a fixed based.
e.g. Augustinians (c. A.D. 450?); Premonstratensians (?)
3. **Friars**, who periodically move between friaries and live a life of community prayer and perform a specific task, e.g. education.
e.g. Carmelites (c. 1154), Franciscans (1209); Dominicans (1220)
4. **Societies of Apostolic Life**, who may or may not pray as a community but share in a particular mission e.g. teaching, social work.
e.g. Jesuits (1540); Redemptorists (1732), Passionists (1737) + Mary Ward's order ...

The history of widely-supported groups in the Church:

1940s-1960s: **Movements** for studying the Gospel and putting its words into practice. Lay members make a long-term commitment within the movement.

1970s-1980s: [After Vatican II updates the Church!] New **Religious Orders** founded which combine an active apostolate with contemplative prayer.

1990s: **Initiatives** which lay people pass through to help deepen their faith.

Key features of the various groups: Investment of time in **PRAYER**, especially Eucharistic Adoration and Marian Consecration; **FIDELITY** to the teachings of the Catholic Church; Apostolic or Evangelical **ACTIVITY** of their members.

New Religious Orders:

These orders place great importance on Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Consecration to Our Lady and strict fidelity to the teaching of the Church. The habit is normally worn and members embrace the ideal of poverty. Lay people are encouraged to become involved in their work.

Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa's order) founded 1950 for women, 1960s for lay brothers, 1976 for contemplative sisters, 1980s for priests, 1986 for lay missionaries.

Companions of the Cross, a society of apostolic life for priests.
Founded in Ottawa, Canada, 1984, by Fr Bob Bedard.

Community of St John, based in France, founded from Dominican roots in the 1960s by Fr Marc-Dominique Philippe OP; its particular speciality is philosophy.

Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, Italy, founded in 1970 by Fr Stephano.
OFM.Cap. A particular calling to poverty, penance, preaching and prayer for conversion.

Community of the Beatitudes, founded 1973 in France by Deacon Ephrem and his wife.
Based on the Carmelite rule it has a contemplative core but draws heavily on Judaism, both for its liturgy and its sense of family. *Members include celibates, couples and singles.*

Community of St John (see above): branch of contemplative sisters founded 1982 and, recently, apostolic sisters.

Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, New York, founded in 1987 by Fr Benedict Groeschel
OFM.Cap. Two key missions: basic evangelisation, and to serve the poorest of the poor.

Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal, founded by the Friars of the Renewal in the 1990s.

Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate, Italy, founded in 1993, three years after the Friars of the Immaculate become independent of the Conventual Franciscans.

Christian Marriage:

Like joining a religious order, Christian Marriage is a lifelong commitment, with vows, to a particular Christian vocation. There are numerous programmes to help couples rediscover their marriage as a relationship with each other and with Jesus, including **Marriage Encounter**, **Cana Weekends**, and the **Teams of Our Lady**. There are also residential centres, such as the **Catholic Centre for Healing in Marriage** in North Wales.

Lay Movements:

Founded in the mid 20th century, these movements place great emphasis on the study of Scripture: lives are changed when the Gospel is lived out. Participants make a long-term commitment to the movement's programme.

Focolare, founded in wartime Italy (1943) by Chiara Lubich.

The Cursillo Movement, founded in Mallorca in 1949, assisted by Bishop Hervas y Benet.

Communion & Liberation, founded in Italy in 1954 by a young priest, Don Giussani.

The Neo-Catechumenal Way, founded in Spain by Kiko Arguello in the early 1960s.

Couples for Christ is a more recent initiative, founded in the Philippines in 1981, which has expanded to include groups for singles, youth and children too. There are now CFC groups in London and Birmingham.

Lay Initiatives:

The late 20th century finds citizens of the Western World unwilling or unable to make long-term commitments. The activities now catching on in the churches seem to be groups and programmes which people pass through in the short or medium term, groups rooted in the same spirituality as the new orders, or the life-changing approach to Scripture of the previous Lay Movements.

Youth 2000, founded in England by Ernest Williams in 1990, runs weekend retreats with the Blessed Sacrament exposed perpetually. The retreatants are taught about the Real Presence, encouraged to pray to Our Lady. Young people on the retreat team witness about their own faith, the value of confession, and the importance of faithfulness to the teachings of the Church. The initiative has now spread throughout Britain, Ireland, the USA, the Caribbean.

The Alpha Course, developed in the late 1980s by a London Anglican Church, Holy Trinity Brompton (Revv Sandy Millar & Nicky Gumbel) but designed to have content acceptable to all major Christian denominations.

Choice weekends and the marriage initiatives already mentioned.

... and of course, the missions run by the **Sion** community.

Specialist Activities:

God refuses to be pigeonholed! There are signs of hope which don't fit into any of the above categories. Catholics are now encouraged to work together with Christians of other denominations where possible (more on this in Talk 3) and our Church has taken a full part in the ecumenical scene in England. Specialist communities have arisen e.g. *Sisters of the Gospel of Life* (doing pro-life work under Cardinal Winning in Glasgow), *L'Arche* (providing caring communities for those with special needs), the Essex-based *United Christian Gospel Choir* (some Catholics started singing Gospel music in 1996 and found other Christians wanted to join in) and *Maranatha* (an ecumenical community which has a particular calling to political lobbying on issues of Christian concern, e.g. the effect of the media on children.)

Some Questions for Lent

Do I pray every day? (Help is available if you don't know how to get started.)

Do I ask Jesus what His will is for major decisions in my life

(career, family, home)?

Do I pray together with my partner? With my children?

Do I read the Bible - especially the Gospel - and try to live out what I read there?

2. Too Busy Not To Pray

(March 16th, A.D. 2000)

Eucharistic Adoration:

Christian Faith must be centred on Jesus! In the Gospels, the key to experiencing the power of God is faith in Jesus. So the centurion who said "I believe, help my unbelief" receives healing for his daughter, but Jesus could work no miracles in his home town because of their lack of faith. God wants to be acknowledged as the only source of spiritual power and only focus of worship - the first of the Ten Commandments is that we must have no other gods. Eucharistic Adoration is a powerful way of centring worship on Jesus, where we publicly place the Blessed Sacrament - his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity - on high to be worshipped.

Reverence, Pharisees, and the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist:

The Gospels record only one group of people whom Jesus condemned: the Pharisees.* They put great emphasis on the external practice of religious duties and little on the attitude of heart which should accompany it. Jesus did not condemn following the rules as such, but put the emphasis on being in a right relationship with God, and accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy.

Many of the new movements within the Church give great emphasis to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus is *at one and the same time* our Lord and God who deserves unlimited awe and reverence; *and also* our eldest brother who desires the most intimate friendship with us.

If we meet a form of worship around the Blessed Sacrament which we don't feel comfortable with, we must not be hasty in judging those who take part. Ask: What is in their hearts? Are they expressing awe? Are they expressing intimacy? Both are appropriate ways of relating to Jesus, within the liturgical guidelines set by the Church.

Another clue we use to judging appropriate behaviour around the Blessed Sacrament is the example of Jesus in His lifetime. God plans to make himself present in bread - this means there are going to be breadcrumbs. He chooses wine - drops are going to be spilled. We must be careful at communion time - but **God** has taken the initiative to become vulnerable in this way and we can't second-guess Him by saying "No communion in the hand! No communion from the chalice!" to protect Him - *He asked to become vulnerable*. Likewise, Jesus did not stop praying in Gethsemane when his friends fell asleep. So as long as a reasonable rota is in place, fear that "someone might not turn up" should never prevent a scheme of perpetual adoration.

From Pope John Paul II (Redemptoris Missio 51)

Every community, if it is to be Christian, must be founded on Christ and live in him, as it listens to the word of God, focuses its prayer on the Eucharist, lives in a communion marked by oneness of heart and soul, and shares according to the needs of its members.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament Initiatives:

Perpetual Adoration: Practiced by religious orders (e.g. Benedictine sisters in Tyburn), there is now parish/deanery based Perpetual Adoration - all night access available by a code lock. The first in Britain seems to be in Beeston (a suburb of Nottingham). But beware of the weasel word ***perpetual*** - if a chapel has "perpetual adoration 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Thursday and Friday" - it ain't perpetual!

Daily Holy Hour: practiced by many of the new orders, including the Missionaries of Charity, Franciscans of the Renewal and Community of St John.

Adoration based retreats: Youth 2000 holds weekend retreats beginning and ending with Mass, and Adoration throughout. The talks to deepen young people's faith are done before and with reference to the Eucharistic Lord (rooted in the 40 hours devotion with preaching of the early Franciscans) and the Healing Service uses a procession of the Blessed Sacrament with a stole draped over the monstrance: young people are invited to touch the stole as a sign of faith as the woman with the haemorrhage touched the cloak of Jesus. Young people who take part find amazing spiritual strength to reform their lives and there are many testimonies of people who have turned away from sin (drug dealing, excessive night-clubbing, etc).

*NB Scholars point out that Jesus' own teaching was much closer to that of the Pharisees than of any other Jewish group of his time, to the extent that Jesus could be called a "Pharisee" himself. We must understand this as pointing out the errors that Pharisees were prone to fall into.

Worship around Exposition: The new charismatic communities (like *Cor-Lumen Christi* in Chertsey) emphasise that their worship is directed to Jesus by standing and singing lively hymns or praying in tongues while standing around the altar where the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.

Adoration and Mission

Sion Community mission teams include Eucharistic devotion as an essential part of the Evangelisation.

(1) They used to run an annual 3-month school for young people to learn to be evangelisers. The programme concluded with a week-long mission by the newly-trained team, beginning with an all-night vigil before the Blessed Sacrament.

(2) Door-to-door evangelisation can be founded on teams of four people. Two do the actual door-to-door work. The other two people consist of a housebound person who shares in that team's work by praying at home, and another person who can attend Church where the Blessed Sacrament is present. It is crucial to have people praying specifically for the individuals doing the outreach.

Consecration to Mary:

There is an active campaign in the Church to have Mary dogmatically proclaimed "Co-redemptrix, Advocate, and Mediatrix of All Graces". These terms sum up three popular Catholic beliefs about Mary: (i) That Jesus couldn't have redeemed humanity without her co-operation; (ii) Whenever we pray, Mary also prays for our needs; (iii) Whenever God gives us grace, Mary has a role in the way in the giving.

A more moderate approach emphasises the good practice of involving Mary in our prayer life whether or not she has these three formal roles. Many of the new groups in the Church have an explicit element of entrusting themselves to Mary's prayers and maternal protection, a practice of "Marian Consecration": *To Jesus, Through Mary*. Certainly the spate of Marian apparitions of the 19th and 20th centuries give great emphasis to the value of asking Mary's prayers. One must always be cautious in basing faith on apparitions and visions; on the other hand, if God really is using this means to speak to us, He must have a good reason!

Key Apparitions of Our Lady:

Mexico (Guadalupe), 1531: Mary's appearance as a pregnant Aztec princess and the lasting image on Blessed Juan Diego's cloak has a profound effect on converting the native people. The miraculous image continues to provide mysteries to scientists who scrutinise it in minute detail.

Rue de Bac, Paris, 1830: Mary asks that we wear the "Miraculous Medal", ask for her prayers, and warns us that we forget to ask for the graces we need.

Lourdes, 1858: Mary asks for penitence and explicitly encourages pilgrimage - a chapel should be built at the grotto and people should come in procession.

Fatima, 1917: Mary asks us to pray the Rosary, and include a prayer for the salvation from Hell of those who most need the Lord's mercy.

Medjugorje, 1981-present: [*The Church permits unofficial pilgrimages but has not made a final judgement on these apparitions.*] Mary emphasises the power of prayer, fasting and confession.

Marian Consecration in Practice:

Pope John Paul II: Places profound importance on the idea of "total consecration to Mary" following the model of St Louis de Montfort's *True Devotion to Mary*. His papal motto *Totus Tuus* ("all yours") indicates his total commitment to Mary in the expectation that she will lead and entrust him to Jesus.

Community of the Beatitudes: Runs the "Communion Mary Queen of Peace", a loose lay movement of people who have followed a 33-day retreat of consecration to Mary (based on De Montfort's *True Devotion* and the Medjugorje Messages).

Franciscans of the Immaculate: Take a special vow of Marian consecration; part of their mission is to spread the Gospel "by making the Immaculate known".

Community of St John: They view their order as imitating St John the beloved, "standing with Mary at the foot of the Cross".

Youth 2000: Part of the mission statement is to lead young people into a relationship with Mary, especially through the Rosary. Young people give testimonies of how they have come to accept Mary as part of their prayer life through these retreats.

Spirituality:

The key test for any spiritual or personal development technique is this: does it lead me closer to Jesus? We should not reject any spiritual practice which does. Anything which leads away from Jesus should be avoided; anything "neutral" should be used in moderation. In a world looking for spirituality, are we presenting Jesus as a relevant person to meet their needs - or is the Christian way just about commandments and do-goodery?

The Western world has passed through an age of great materialism and rejection of spiritual values. But in the last decades of the 20th century there is a renewed interest in spirituality, in the form of the *New Age* movement. Young people in particular are looking for ways to connect with something beyond themselves, and so they turn to crystals, horoscopes, Tarot cards or angel cards; even reputable businesses may now employ *feng shui* experts to align the furniture according to Chinese spiritual teaching.

This is at once a sign of hope and a cause for worry. Hope, because it means that Western people are reaching beyond materialism and searching for God. Worry, because they are not receiving Christianity as an answer.

Some Questions for Lent

Do I genuflect when entering the presence of the Blessed Sacrament?

Do I make a special effort to get to Church for Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament?

Am I in danger of being a "Pharisee" in my attitude to other people's reverence?

How is Billingshurst & Pulborough's Jubilee going to be "Intensely Eucharistic"?

Do I believe that Mary has a special God-given role of praying for me and my needs?

Do I ask Mary to pray for me and my family, especially for grace I forget to ask for?

3. By Whose Authority?

(March 23rd, A.D. 2000)

Authority: A Sign of Hope?

The Roman Catholic Church claims a great deal of authority for its institutions. *Managerial* authority exists in the worldwide church (e.g. appointment of bishops) as well as in local dioceses and religious orders (promises of obedience by a priest to his bishop, or the vows of nuns and monks within their orders). There is also *Teaching* authority which guides the Church in understanding the truth about God and the moral life which He wants Christians to lead.

At worst, authority can be misused. The Church can become unresponsive to local initiatives, movements can become as controlling as "cults". Without well-used authority, however, the church cannot function with unity of mission and belief. Seen as part of God's gift of unity, authority is a positive thing. The movements and orders we have looked at in past weeks have to be acting in union with Church teaching and managerial authority to be regarded as true signs of hope!

From Pope John Paul II (Redemptoris Missio 51):

As Pope Paul VI recalled, every community must live in union with the particular [this means the local diocese - A&B for us] and the universal Church, in heartfelt communion with the Church's pastors and the Magisterium, with a commitment to missionary outreach and without yielding to isolationism or ideological exploitation. And the Synod of Bishops stated: "Because the Church is communion, the new 'basic communities,' if they truly live in unity with the Church, are a true expression of communion and a means for the construction of a more profound communion. They are thus cause for great hope for the life of the Church."

"Managerial" Authority:

New lay communities, religious orders, and even the organising groups of the most recent "initiatives" need some kind of internal authority. It is important for the group to have a sensible balance. If the central authority becomes too strict, or unwilling to listen to members needs and ideas, the group cannot thrive; or else "disagreement" is ruled to be improper, and then the group is in danger of becoming some kind of "cult". (A key test is whether members of the group are free to cease their involvement without being made to feel that they are failing in their responsibility to live the life which God wants of them - though there is a huge difference between the case of a religious brother or sister who has made lifelong vows, and that of a non-Christian pondering whether to go to the third session of an *Alpha* course!)

On the other hand, a good leader will understand what God is calling that particular group to do as a role within the Church, and will resist blurring its identity: if a group is called to be a praying community and people join for the prayer life, don't suddenly shift your focus to delivering food parcels to the homeless. That's a good thing to do in general, but *not as your group*. The sense of belonging to a particular cause is very attractive to young people, and with good pastoring provides a place to learn about Christian tolerance of other people and their ideas!

Teaching Authority:

The duty of the institutional Church is to teach the truth: the truth about God and the truth about moral behaviour. This isn't always popular - but neither was Jesus (see John 6:66). Unfortunately, we live in a culture (in our Western world) which has fallen into relativism: "you have your values, and I have mine". This can touch Catholic religious education and youth programmes so the emphasis is on getting young people to share about the values which they have chosen to hold, steering away from challenging the youth to accept the values and truths taught by the Church.

Many of the new movements in the Church accept the idea of a central teaching authority without quibble, and actively work to give Catholic teaching to young people. The *Franciscans of the Renewal* in New York have an explicit mission to evangelise, and do so in strict keeping with Church teaching. *Youth 2000* challenges young people to accept Church teaching and to realise that breaking teachings which are part of God's law is **sin**, which must be cleansed by sacramental confession. Another British group, the *Faith Movement* also attracts young people and specialises in integrating Catholic teaching with the scientific and technological world we live in. Contrary to popular expectation, young people thrive when given clear teaching to fill the moral vacuum of relativism.

Ecumenism - Principles

Ecumenism: Co-operation between Christians of different denominations. To be recognised as a Christian church, a group must believe in the three persons of the Holy Trinity, and in the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Quakers, however, are usually recognised as Christian even though they do not have a formal creed of the Trinity. ***Because Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestant groups are present in the UK in roughly equal numbers, Britain is a particularly important place for ecumenical projects and developments.***

The "Swanwick Declaration": A joint declaration between the major denominations in England that Christians should strive to do together *everything* which need not be done separately.

Healthy Ecumenism: Respecting the different beliefs of each other's Christian traditions, and doing together as many things as possible where principles are not compromised. For example, joint prayer services, pooling resources in work with the poor, basic evangelisation. [Alongside this, formal commissions are looking at whether our principles express different beliefs, or just different ways of working through the same belief.]

Token Ecumenism: Doing things with other churches only at symbolic times, e.g. Christian Unity week in January. There is nothing wrong with special unity services - but we can easily hide behind them and not tackle the real questions about sharing the everyday work and ministry.

False Ecumenism: Pretending that the differences between denominations are not important, and inviting people to break the discipline of one tradition to do things together (e.g. habitually offering Protestants the Catholic Eucharist). This violates the integrity of the different groups involved.

Ecumenism - Signs of Hope

Churches Together in England: In September 1990, the Roman Catholic Church in England became a full-fledged member of *Churches Together in England*, a body which replaced the old ecumenical council on which Catholics only took observer status.

The Alpha Course: Developed by Holy Trinity Brompton (Anglican), the course contains teaching that all Christian denominations can agree to. Many parishes, including Catholic ones, are using it as a tool to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ.

Maranatha: This ecumenical community has local groups which meet for prayer with a focus on healing. It has also done very important work in Christian awareness of social problems, e.g. a 1995 report entitled *What on Earth are we Doing to our Children?* which the Government took very seriously.

Local Ecumenical Projects: In many parts of Britain, Catholics are playing a full part in joint parishes. The Church of Christ the Cornerstone in Milton Keynes is the most well-known shared building.

Intercommunion Issues

Christians of other denominations: The Eucharist is a sign of sharing and belonging. Non-Catholics are not normally admitted to communion because they have chosen to belong to a different Christian community, and so cannot also give a sign of belonging to the Catholic community. But for a Christian *who agrees with Catholic teaching on the Real Presence of Jesus* (in practice, the Eastern Orthodox and High Anglicans), and who genuinely cannot attend their own church, they may receive the Catholic sacrament. Conversely, Catholics unable to attend Mass who have access to a church whose priesthood and Eucharist we recognise as valid, have Catholic permission to communicate there.

In the UK, the Bishops have interpreted "not being able to attend your own church" to apply to major family religious events (e.g. marriage, children's first communion) where a believing non-Catholic partner wants to be united with his/her family. Since that partner remains a member of a different church, however, it is not appropriate to allow habitual intercommunion.

Divorced and remarried Catholics are confronted with the very hard teaching of Jesus that, having made a lifelong commitment to partner A, they are not permitted to divorce A and marry B - even though A was violent and B the most tender, loving, partner imaginable. The Church offers Communion to those who are earnestly seeking to follow the teaching of Christ - an impasse.

Some Questions for Lent

Am I willing to co-operate with plans I don't like for the sake of parish unity?

Do I value the teaching authority of the Church as something which helps my faith?

Are there ways in which any of my church activities could be done in co-operation with the other Christian churches in Billingshurst and district?

4. Go Forth and Make Disciples

(March 30th, A.D. 2000)

The Words of the Lord

The Risen Jesus speaks to the Eleven: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time." (**Matt 28:19-20**)

The Mission of the Church

The Church is made of individual Christians, some ordained, some in religious vows, most living and working in the world. Jesus commissions his followers to "go and make disciples" and "keep his commands". What does this mean in practice? For some, the way to witness is by doing works of charity, helping needy people regardless of faith, and not preaching other than by actions which say "we are helping you because we are a Christian organisation". Thus, the work of **Mother Teresa's** orders and all the lay volunteers who come to help them; the **Franciscans of the Renewal** running homeless shelters in New York; the **Lord's Ranch** in El Paso (Texas) which took food parcels to the hungry of Mexico's rubbish dumps and experienced miraculous multiplication of food.

Then there are communities whose focus is some social work but which are explicitly spiritual in their programmes: **Cenacolo** communities in Italy (and now spreading into other countries) which help young people come off drugs by going "cold turkey" with a full time buddy (ex-addict) accompanying them. (Participants have the option of spending their days wither in manual labour or in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.) Or the **L'Arche** communities where people with learning difficulties live together with those who support them, with an element of Christian worship in the life of the house. While most lay Catholics are not involved in one of these movements, many may be involved in the social apostolate through the SVP or at least fundraising for good causes.

As well as our social duties, though, we cannot avoid **evangelisation**. "To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and of each believer." (*Catechism* 904). We must ask ourselves: "How effective is the way we live our lives in public - and before our families at home - as an advertisement for Christianity? For the Catholic Faith?" And while living "Christian lives" is the form of witness we are usually called to give, the *Catechism* (905) reminds us that this "is not the sole element in the apostolate; the true apostle is always on the lookout for occasions of announcing Christ by word, either to unbelievers, or to the faithful."

In the developed Western World, where cultures which were once Christian have moved on to become a technological, sceptical, Godless world, the Church faces the challenge of "New Evangelisation": finding the right language to speak about God to such peoples. Diverse responses to this challenge exist in the missions run by the **Franciscans of the Renewal** and by **Youth 2000**, or the street witness of groups like the **Jerusalem Community** in Paris or even individuals like Bro. Juniper OFM in Guildford!

From Pope John Paul II (Redemptoris Missio 86)

Christian hope sustains us in committing ourselves fully to the new evangelization and to the worldwide mission, and leads us to pray as Jesus taught us: "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).

The number of those awaiting Christ is still immense: the human and cultural groups not yet reached by the Gospel, or for whom the Church is scarcely present, are so widespread as to require the uniting of all the Church's resources. As she prepares to celebrate the jubilee of the year 2000, the whole Church is even more committed to a new missionary advent. We must increase our apostolic zeal to pass on to others the light and joy of the faith, and to this high ideal the whole People of God must be educated.

We cannot be content when we consider the millions of our brothers and sisters, who like us have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but who live in ignorance of the love of God. For each believer, as for the entire Church, the missionary task must remain foremost, for it concerns the eternal destiny of humanity and corresponds to God's mysterious and merciful plan.

From Pope Paul VI (Evangelii Nuntiandi 28 & 29)

... Evangelization cannot but include the prophetic proclamation of a hereafter, man's profound and definitive calling, in both continuity and discontinuity with the present situation: beyond time and history, beyond the transient reality of this world, and beyond the things of this world, of which a hidden dimension will one day be revealed--beyond man himself, whose true destiny is not restricted to his temporal aspect but will be revealed in the future life.

Evangelization therefore also includes the preaching of hope in the promises made by God in the new Covenant in Jesus Christ; the preaching of God's love for us and of our love for God; the preaching of brotherly love for all men--the capacity of giving and forgiving, of self-denial, of helping one's brother and sister--which, springing from the love of God, is the kernel of the Gospel; the preaching of the mystery of evil and of the active search for good. The preaching likewise--and this is always urgent--of the search for God Himself through prayer which is principally that of adoration and thanksgiving, but also through communion with the visible sign of the encounter with God which is the Church of Jesus Christ; and this communion in its turn is expressed by the application of those other signs of Christ living and acting in the Church which are the sacraments. To live the sacraments in this way, bringing their celebration to a true fullness, is not, as some would claim, to impede or to accept a distortion of evangelization: it is rather to complete it. For in its totality, evangelization--over and above the preaching of a message--consists in the implantation of the Church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist.

But evangelization would not be complete if it did not take account of the unceasing interplay of the Gospel and of man's concrete life, both personal and social. This is why evangelization involves an explicit message, adapted to the different situations constantly being realised, about the rights and duties of every human being, about family life without which personal growth and development is hardly possible, about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development--a message especially energetic today about liberation.

Cultures of Life and Death

The present Holy Father has put great emphasis on the struggle to live a "Culture of Life" in a world which is immersed in a "Culture of Death". Human life is no longer regarded as an absolute good, but something to be measured according to convenience and disposed of in certain cases: abortion, and now the threat of euthanasia rising into public acceptance. Part of the same trend is seen in the current debates in Britain about the repeal of Clause 28 preventing schools promoting homosexual lifestyles, and the rethinking of penalties for the use of certain illegal drugs. The right of the (healthy adult) individual to do "whatever I want" is the guiding principle, rather than moral standards.

Against this, groups such as LIFE and SPUC (not Catholic groups *per se* but with great Catholic support) are active in campaigning and providing "alternative care", and Cardinal Winning in Glasgow has put the Church's money where its mouth is in offering to help out women who turn to abortion as "economic necessity". From this work, a fledgling religious order, ***The Sisters of the Gospel of Life*** is even now taking shape. The name reflects the Papal Encyclical, in Latin *Evangelium Vitae*, published in 1996. In February this year, the Pope wrote a reflection on this document and quoted from it:

"To all the members of the Church, the people of life and for life, I make this most urgent appeal, that together we may offer this world of ours new signs of hope, and work to ensure that justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed, for the building of an authentic civilisation of truth and love."

Many of the new movements and orders within the Church have a pro-life element; this follows naturally from their commitment to following Church teaching and the key emphasis which the Holy Father has placed on the importance of the Gospel of Life in today's world.

Some Questions for Lent

What things do I do in my public life because I am a Christian? And in my family life?

Do other people know I am a Christian when I do "good works"?

How willing am I to talk about my faith, or about Jesus, to a non-believer?

Do I actively support the pro-life cause?

5. Do Not Be Afraid!

(April 6th, A.D. 2000)

Types of new activity within the Church:

Lay Movements to which lay people make a long-term commitment.

Religious Orders which combine an active apostolate with contemplative prayer.

Initiatives which lay people pass through to help deepen their faith.

Key Ingredients:

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament: The Eucharist is at the heart.

Devotion to Our Lady: Regular use of the Rosary and/or some form of "consecration of life and works to the care of Our Lady".

Prayer in common and in private surrounding the work of the movement: petition for its workers, prayers of thanksgiving for work done and blessings received; intercession for the Church and the World.

Obedience without argument to those doctrines taught by the Magisterium, the teaching authority of our Church.

Willing co-operation with the leaders of the community or movement so there is unity of purpose and an agreed sense of priorities in the work.

Ecumenism: working together with other Christian churches - even where this means extra work in shared planning - *whenever* it is possible to do so.

Sharing experiences of your faith and of God's blessing with other members of the community, to encourage one another and build unity.

Evangelisation: speaking about Jesus to those people who He wants to know about Him. (That means everyone - practising Catholics, the lapsed, those never baptised.) A good way to do this gently is by telling friends in need that you will pray for them.

Being Pro-Life: that includes an anti-abortion stance but goes much wider. Human life is a *good thing* and that has *lots* of implications.

Living the Gospel: doing that bit extra to help people in ways the Gospel encourages - feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those in prison.

From Pope John Paul II (Pentecost 1998 - To Movements gathered in Rome)

In our world often dominated by a secularised culture which ferments and advertises models of life without God, the faith of many people is put to a hard test and not rarely suffocated and stifled. In this context, there is clearly an urgent need for strong proclamation and solid, in-depth Christian formation. What a need there is today for mature Christian personalities who are aware of their own baptismal identity, of their own vocation and mission in the Church and in the world! What a need there is for living Christian communities! Here, then, are the movements and new ecclesial communities; they are an answer, stirred up by the Holy Spirit, to answer this dramatic challenge at the end of the millennium.

The Way Forward:

You are a community. You are the Catholic Community of Billingshurst & Pulborough. You are the baptised people of God in and around the largest village in England. You too are called to be mature Christian personalities, to understand the gift and responsibility which your Baptism and Confirmation carry. The Holy Father asks you to be aware of the mission and identity which the Holy Spirit has given you as part of the larger life of the Church.

Above are the keys which many movements and communities have found to unlock the power of God and bind themselves into being a deeper Christian community. Don't use them all at once or all at the same time: that would be overkill. But do make use of them. Do you want your parish to grow, to bring the lapsed back to the Lord's supper, and the unbaptised into the body of Christ? If not, why not? But if so, what are you going to do about it?

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